

January 4, 2008

News from Mr. Whiting's Class

Dear Family,

This winter, I've decided to improve my skiing skills. I took a lesson a couple weekends ago, and while working with my instructor, I had the chance to be the student for a change. At times I felt encouraged; at times I felt stressed and frustrated; at times I felt that I wanted to please the teacher; at times I felt she wasn't communicating clearly; at times I wondered whether I was trying hard enough; at times I felt overwhelmed by all she was asking me to do at once. I think it's good for a teacher to experience the range of emotions and thoughts of the student. Doing so informs my teaching. In the classroom, I try to provide plenty of encouragement, for the whole class and for each student. I try to communicate clearly. I try to get students to want to learn. I try to give each student work that is neither too easy nor too hard.

These characteristics of good teaching are especially important in math. Students are now in the middle of a unit on geometry. They have already learned about coordinates, Venn diagrams, angles, and various shapes and how they relate to each other. They will soon learn about symmetry, area and perimeter, and movements of shapes (called transformations). On a test today, students demonstrated how well they have mastered the material learned so far. But one of the most important aspects of the test was the preparation each student did at home. We have had class discussions about how to prepare for a math test (It's more than gazing at the math notebook) and the importance of study skills (They will be useful in every year of schooling).

Running in parallel to our study of geometry, our practice with math facts is coming to an end. Students have been improving their accuracy and speed. You'll see your child's record of improvement. On a pink sheet your child will bring home this month, you'll see that students had the opportunity to move on to the next operation (addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division) when they felt ready. Although I oversaw their decision making, students seemed especially motivated this year since they were choosing which operation to work on, they were monitoring their progress, and they

decided when they were satisfied with their improvements. In past years, I made all of these decisions for the students, and this year's class seems more eager to work on math facts than previous years' classes. All of their hard work will pay off in the fractions unit, which entails computing many math facts within larger problems. Facility with math facts will also be useful in all future years of math.

I'll have much more to say about mathematics in future newsletters in 2008. Thank you for reading this month's note.

I hope the year is off to a great start for you and your family. From listening to their vacation stories, the children seem to have ended 2007 with happy memories!

Sincerely,

Brian Whiting

